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Review of the regional cooperation framework for Asia and the Pacific, 1997-2001

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Introduction

1. The mid-term review of the first regional cooperation framework (RCF) for Asia and the Pacific was conducted during the period October 1999 to April 2000. The process, carried out by two external consultants, included country visits, national consultations in six other countries, a desk review of 17 major projects, in-depth analysis of a questionnaire submitted to all principal project representatives (PPRs), all project chief technical advisers, and in-depth interviews by the consultants with all programme managers based in the Regional Bureau as well as relevant persons in the Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) and in the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Finally, early drafts were shared with country offices for comment prior to finalization.

2. The Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific supports the findings of the review team and has no major points of divergence from the findings and recommendations of the team.

I. The regional context

3. The East Asian financial crisis proved to be a major setback to the gains made in both economic growth and key human development achievements, particularly for the most affected countries in South-East Asia. While economic recovery is now well under way — albeit not uniformly across the region — reclaiming the human costs of the financial collapse will be harder.

4. Political instability, civil unrest and ethnic and religious conflicts continue to impact the development priorities of many countries of the region and pose critical challenges not only to the development aspirations of countries and their peoples but also to regional development cooperation.

5. Against this backdrop, the region is home to the largest numbers of people living in poverty — over half a billion — and their numbers continue to grow, particularly in South Asia, as indicated in the *Poverty Report 2000* (UNDP, 2000). The incidence of women and children in poverty remains distressingly high and their status in terms of education, health care and access to social and economic goods supports the analysis that poverty is both a consequence and cause of near stagnant human development.

6. Rapid growth in population and economy in the Asia and the Pacific region is placing greater pressure on the environment and natural resources both regionally and globally. Transboundary environmental issues such as water and haze pollution remain a perennial hazard requiring a more urgent and coordinated regional response. Impact on global environment issues (e.g., climate change and depletion of biodiversity) puts the long-term sustainable development of the region at risk. The region has also been exposed and is vulnerable to natural disasters in the past few years, such as drought and floods, highlighting the need to increase focus on the sustainable management of natural resources.

7. HIV/AIDS remains a growing major health and development concern, especially among young people and women. This is a daunting development challenge, with more than five million affected people in the region, particularly in the South-East Asian and South Asian subregions. Persistent underreporting, and difficulties associated with holding open public dialogues necessary to respond effectively to this epidemic, contribute to this state of affairs, as do issues such as the growing problem of trafficking in women and children.

8. Such daunting development challenges in the region, along with the continuing pressures of globalization, have prompted governments actively to seek reforms in the structures and processes of their governing institutions. The reform of public and corporate sector governance mechanisms to make them increasingly participatory, accountable, and transparent, has emerged as a clear response to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and to ensure more equitable and sustainable development for the future. These government-led efforts across the region have enabled UNDP to offer increased support to such initiatives at both national and regional levels.

II. The regional cooperation framework

9. The regional cooperation framework (RCF) was developed over the period 1995 to 1996, beginning with the lessons learned from the mid-term evaluation of the fifth intercountry programme and culminating in consultations with governments and UNDP resident representatives in a series of national-level and

subregional cluster meetings. The result is an RCF established within the framework of sustainable human development (SHD) that balances social equity and environmental priorities with a parallel focus and emphasis on sound economic management and strategies conducive to economic growth. The RCF, approved for the period 1997 to 2001 by the Executive Board at its second regular session 1997, was established on the basis of three themes considered to be of the highest priority for regional cooperation: (a) human development and equity; (b) environment and natural resource management; and (c) enabling economic environment and public policy.

10. Special characteristics of regional cooperation in addressing national development challenges were defined in the RCF and included as criteria for the appraisal of component projects. These are: (a) the promotion, sharing and joint management of natural, technical and financial resources; (b) contribution to, or advocacy of, regional standards and policies; (c) fostering research or demonstration work that cannot be adequately undertaken nationally; (d) creating or sustaining networks of learning and expertise with governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in different countries; and (e) a focus on issues that are transboundary in nature and share common, interlinked concerns for the many countries involved.

11. Parts of the RCF provide follow-up to global conferences. In particular the Gender Programme (APGEN) relates to the Beijing Platform for Action; the South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) is a response to the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) and to the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit Declaration on Poverty of 1993. The Vienna Programme of Action is reflected in the regional governance programme and human settlements in The Urban Governance Initiative (TUGI). Other programmes support the mandates and goals of intergovernmental organizations of the region such as the Association for South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Mekong River Commission (MRC), the Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP) and the South Pacific Community in areas that are consistent with the UNDP SHD mandate. The UNDP role within the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) forms the basis for the HIV and development programme.

III. Regional programme performance

12. As of mid-2000, most programmes within the RCF are still in the early stages of implementation, having gone through the initial consultation, design and preparatory start-up phases during the first 18 months of the present programming period. However, even at this stage of implementation, most programmes have produced interim results that can be measured over the longer term.

13. Generally, interim results suggest that the RCF has enhanced regional cooperation. This is suggested, for example, by (a) the increased use of demonstration projects to influence policy changes as with SAPAP, the Sustainable Microfinance Livelihoods Programme (SMILE), the Private Sector and Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (PSSLP), the Integrated Community Approach for Resource and Environment (ICARE) and the Pacific Islands Forests and Trees Support project, (b) the contribution to the promotion of global or regional norms and standards as with APGEN, TUGI, the Regional Governance Programme (PARAGON), the HIV and Development Programme and the North-East Asia Atmospheric Pollution project; (c) the increase in and productive use of knowledge networks and partners, as with the HIV and Development Programme, the Asia and the Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP), Isotopes for Environment, and APGEN; (d) the influencing of national policy, the widening of policy dialogue, through the provision of "space" for political and economic dialogue and the setting of policy standards, as with the Tumen Programme, Support to the Mekong River Commission, the Pacific Governance Programme, and APGEN; and (e) the strengthening of institutional capacity for effecting such policy as seen through the ASEAN Programme, the Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP), the Mekong River Commission and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

A. Human development and equity

14. The RCF objective under this theme is to assist countries to define new approaches, and strengthen existing approaches and modalities in order to minimize existing and emerging disparities in capacities and livelihoods.

15. From the results so far achieved, the HIV and Development Programme exemplifies how it is possible to widen policy dialogues and influence policy changes in sensitive issue areas. The programme has stimulated partnership among four universities in the region to collaborate on the design of an HIV-impact analysis framework for use by ministries of finance, banks and private sector developers. At this nascent stage, it has attracted the attention of UNAIDS, some donor representatives and governments. Other interim outputs include assessments of population mobility in South-East Asia (influencing ASEAN task force policy); the Speaker's Manual for HIV Positive People (providing a platform for greater involvement of people living with HIV); and the Report on Social and Economic Causes and Consequences of HIV in South Asia (attracting the attention of decision makers). The HIV programme is also a vehicle for South-South cooperation and has facilitated programmes for the exchange of experiences between South-East and North-East Asian NGOs, resulting in increased understanding, especially in North-East Asia, of practical approaches to working at the community level on HIV prevention and care issues.

16. *The South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP).* The aims of this programme are: (a) to achieve results by demonstrating the feasibility of social mobilization mechanisms; (b) to influence national capacities for integration of growth and poverty-alleviation policies and (c) to enhance national capacities for participatory monitoring of poverty programmes. Under SAPAP, 6,300 community groups of 130,000 households were formed in five South Asian countries. These groups have currently saved $2.7 million and manage a credit pool of $15 million, with the project providing only 14 per cent of that amount as seed capital. The programme is linked with the country cooperation frameworks for Bangladesh and India, supporting their respective community-empowerment efforts. The World Bank agreed to expand the social mobilization approach demonstrated by SAPAP throughout Andhra Pradesh, under its District Poverty Initiative Programme. The Bank also commissioned a study of SAPAP in Bangladesh as a prelude to such cooperation.

17. However, a 1998 evaluation of SAPAP concluded that the programme was not sustainable on such a large scale given resource constraints. Future regionally funded interventions in poverty alleviation should focus on building capacity and advocating pro-poor policy change.

18. *The gender programme APGEN.* Through this programme, analyses of gender policy issues of regional concern are undertaken. It has strengthened a network of women in government and NGOs. Its work on recognizing women's unpaid work and integrating this into national policies has stimulated the interest of the Asian Development Bank (AsDB) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The APGEN web site and electronic newsletter disseminate information and advocacy materials on gender. The active participation of the UNDP network of gender focal points provides support for outcomes from national projects. Such linkages also extend to governance and poverty-alleviation programmes. Some of the ongoing and prospective collaborative projects are: in Sri Lanka, the country-based project, Enhancing the Capacity of the Ministry of Women's Affairs; in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Capacity-building of the Lao Women's Union; in Pakistan, the National Gender Programme and Governance Programme; and in the Republic of Korea, Gender Disaggregation on Human Resource Accounting; in the Pacific, Promoting Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Ratification and Implementation; and, in Mongolia, conducting a pilot time-use survey.

B. Environmental and natural resources management

19. The thematic objective is to facilitate transboundary cooperation in the management of water, air and other commonly shared environmental resources.

20. Among the results so far obtained, UNDP support to the Mekong River Commission was instrumental in achieving the Mekong Agreement by the four Mekong River Basin countries. A strategic plan for transboundary management of the common resources was also developed with UNDP support. The regional project leveraged $500,000 of Capacity 21 resources for implementation of this plan. The Pacific Fruit Flies project eradicated major fruit pests in Nauru and Solomon Islands, establishing quarantine services in nine countries, and enabling Cook Islands, Fiji and Tonga to emerge as fruit exporters. The Pacific

Forestry programme developed a national forestry policy in Vanuatu, trained more than 150 trainers per year from 5 Pacific Island Countries in improved forestry technologies, and introduced agro-forestry technologies in Kiribati and the Marshall Islands. Overall, the environmental projects in the Pacific have fostered strong partnership with the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, who have contributed $1.6 million in cost-sharing. In North-East Asia, the Atmospheric Pollution Reduction project achieved strategic consensus on transboundary pollution controls administered by a joint monitoring centre in China. The project also established a pilot coal-briquette plant, demonstrating and disseminating results of cleaner coal-combustion technology in Mongolia. The Environmental Toxicology project established an information network that monitors and shares regional practices in toxic-waste management in Mekong River Basin countries. The Isotopes for Environment project, covering the whole Asia and Pacific region, has contributed to the establishment of centres in four countries in introducing isotope technology to the management of water, air and marine resources and has promoted the adoption of cleaner, more energy-efficient industrial production processes and standards.

C. Enabling economic environment and public policy

21. The approach to support this objective is to build capacities in management and governance that lead to increased foreign direct investment and trade in the context of globalization, take advantage of information and communication technology; address issues of transparency, rights, functioning of parliaments, elections, and enhance job creation and sustainable livelihoods.

22. Within this thematic area, programmes seek to influence policy regimes and/or build institutional capacity for policy change. The Regional Governance Programme (PARAGON) is stimulating regional dialogue and learning on issues such as electoral reform, anti-corruption, accountability and transparency, human rights for development and enhancing the role of the media. The interest shown and the attendance at seminars of ministerial-level representatives, legislators and policy-makers from the region is an important interim achievement and should aid the pace of implementing such initiatives. PARAGON provides an advocacy platform for regional dialogue and learning on issues such as electoral reform, anti-corruption, accountability and transparency, human rights for development and enhancing the role of the media.

23. *The Asia Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP)* This programme is building institutional capacity for policy enhancement for SHD, taking advantage of changing technological opportunities through training and seminars covering 42 countries in the region through the 24 UNDP country offices. APDIP has facilitated Internet connectivity in Bhutan and Tuvalu and, using wireless technologies, established Internet connectivity in East Timor via satellite, thereby creating the first Internet service provider in the country, which will eventually be transferred to the Government. APDIP is providing technological support to the ECO as well as to ASEAN in Internet connectivity. APDIP is also assisting governments to formulate national information technology policies and communications infrastructure, and, in partnership with CISCO Systems, has established APDIP networking academies for the webmaster-development workshops.

24. The Tumen Programme is focused within the three thematic areas with strategic support for the establishment of frameworks and intergovernmental agreements within the transport, tourism, environment and investment-cooperation sectors. It has established partnerships with the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the World Bank, AsDB and United Nations organizations within the established intergovernmental framework. Policy dialogues have resulted in: (a) opening trade and transit routes that were previously closed; (b) promoting greater international use of existing national transport capacities; (c) increasing international private-sector investment (e.g., Tumen investment services centres and investment forums); (d) developing private-sector infrastructure (e.g., China-Democratic People's Republic of Korea railroad), free economic zones (e.g., Rajin-Sonbong zone in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), tourism and ferry agreements. International agreements have also been reached, between participating nations, in particular the establishment of the Tumen Coordinating Committee, Consultative Commission, and the Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Principles. Implementation and follow-up include a transboundary diagnostic analysis with the

aim of strengthening government and community-based institutions through technical, environmental and management assessments.

D. Key issues

1. Regional and national linkages

25. Efforts should be intensified in formulating an interface between regional programmes to facilitate the collaboration and exchange of experience, expertise and lessons learned. The active collaboration between HIV and Development and the Urban Governance Initiative as well as the Sustainable Microfinance and Livelihoods (SMILE) Programme serves as an example. Such mechanisms should aim at cross-fertilization between programming in areas such as poverty and gender and HIV and development, including the Trafficking in Women and Children project in the Mekong subregion.

26. Particular mention should be made of the regional support to the development of national human development reports (NHDRs). Regional seed funding for the initial reports provided a springboard for the production of subsequent NHDRs, presenting partner governments with an analytical tool to assess progress in areas of human development. Twenty-two countries in the region have produced at least one NHDR, funded either by regional resources (13) or by the Poverty Strategy Initiative (PSI).

27. However, the mid-term review revealed that the link between the global and regional programme is not particularly well detailed and structured in programme activities as it should be. A clearer set of action links with specific objectives and processes should be established where appropriate.

2. Subregional programming

28. A greater concentration of projects within subregional groupings has been witnessed during the period under review. Subregional project budgets comprised $22.5 million, or 72 per cent of the total budget approved in 1997-1999. Subregional modalities evidently benefited from best practices and lessons learned during the fifth programming cycle. This review has found that, overall, subregional programmes performed comparatively better and are in the process of achieving specific results thanks to: (a) their greater cohesiveness in coordination and management, made possible since they involve a smaller cluster of countries (e.g., ASEAN, ECO, SAARC, TRADP, the South Pacific Commission (SPC)), allowing efficient resource management; (b) greater involvement and ownership by partner governments — the results are underpinned by a political commitment and backstopped by the respective leading subregional institutions, e.g., ASEAN, ECO, SAARC; (c) greater sense of mutual gains and commonality of concerns and objectives — the problems addressed are more acutely felt (e.g., financial crisis, economic integration) and the impact of results more concentrated (e.g., economic and social recovery, economic governance); (d) the sharing of boundaries or natural resources within geographic proximity; and (e) less scattering of limited financial resources, allowing better economies and resource management. The implementation of programmes around a subregional modality has resulted in greater emphasis on the continuous exchange of experiences and learning.

29. An example of a subregional approach is the Pacific Economic Financial Management Reform programme, which led to the creation of the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre to address reforms in the Pacific Island countries. The Centre provides assistance to the 15 Pacific Island countries in elaborating reform plans and agreements on economic and financial issues in the region and in technical implementation at the national level. It also provides continuity of advice thereby building trust, bringing the Centre's services closer to the clients, and remaining part of the reform movement in the Pacific subregion.

30. Subregional gains in addressing countries facing specific crises are also evidenced in projects such as Special Assistance to Countries in Economic Crisis in Asia, TRADP, MRC, ASEAN. Projects in the Pacific Subregion such as the Pacific Regional Governance Programme and the Sustainable Microfinance and Livelihoods Programme (SMILE), with their specific geographic, sharper focus on common issues and the ability to derive economies of scale, provide further examples of the merits of subregional programming. The foregoing does not reduce the importance of region-wide programming. Rather, the successful experience in subregional programming suggests a need to reconsider the conceptual framework for region-wide approaches in addressing critical regional issues. Certain regional initiatives and development

issues continue to be more effectively addressed through region-wide approaches.

3. Emergency response mechanisms

31. The effectiveness of the regional programme in responding to sudden crisis, such as the East-Asian financial crisis, was hampered by a lack of a mechanism to fund appropriate activities quickly. Apart from designing flexibility for response into programmes, the allocation of a certain percentage of RCF funds should be considered to meet such unforeseen events.

4. Knowledge networks

32. The RCF has been deficient in information-sharing and communication in terms of the exchange of experience and lessons learned with participating stakeholders, as well as in providing information of the programmes to wider audiences. Telling the story of the results and impacts of the regional programmes would help to facilitate the current problems of resource constraints and should be an integral part of resource mobilization strategies.

33. In many cases, networks of national government agencies also involve, and are sometimes led by, civil society groups or the private sector. The most notable example of increased private sector partnerships in implementation is the APDIP-CISCO Networking Academy, which train students in countries of the region, through up-to-date information technology curricula to meet the demands and enormous opportunities of the information economy while creating a qualified talent pool for building and maintaining networks. Thanks to this initiative, APDIP won the Stockholm Challenge Award.

5. Partnerships

34. More partnerships have been established to address intercountry development challenges than in previous regional programmes. Key partners now include the private sector, regional institutions, municipalities and provincial or state governments. Partnerships have aimed at developing capacities of institutions or subregional country clusters on the one hand, and, on the other hand, have brought together regional capacities to develop jointly and validate specific new approaches and products aimed at influencing national approaches to development challenges.

35. The ASEAN Economic Recovery Programme assists ASEAN and works in partnership with the AsDB Regional Economic Monitoring Unit (REMU) in building ASEAN's monitoring capacity and production of surveillance reports on economic and social developments during the critical economic recovery period. REMU also operates the Asia Recovery Information Centre (ARIC) under an advisory board composed of representatives from AsDB, the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC), ASEAN, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), UNDP and the World Bank. The ARIC high-frequency indicators include 60-70 key variables for each country under five categories: performance indicators; policy indicators; market indicators; and social indicators. The data are drawn from national sources through a contact in each country, from international sources such as IMF or BIS, or from private information providers such as Bloomberg.

36. Similarly, the Trafficking in Women and Children Project, with UNDP as the lead agency, is supported by a partnership of ten United Nations organizations (ESCAP, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNAIDS, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)), one international organization (the International Organization for Migration (IOM)), and six non-governmental organizations (Child Rights-Asianet, End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT), the Global Alliance Against Trafficking (GAATW), the Mekong Regional Law Centre, Save the Children Alliance, and World Vision) to provide a comprehensive, coordinated response to the problem of trafficking of women and children in the subregion. Such United Nations system partnerships, based on common goals, are valuable and should be expanded.

37. SAPAP has also attracted $1.2 million from the Norwegian Development Corporation (NORAD) for activities in poverty policy and monitoring and $950,000 from the United Nations Fund for

International Partnerships for field activities in Andhra Pradesh, India. The social mobilization approach is being replicated in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka through parallel funding of approximately $10 million from the country TRACs of those countries. The Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom has funded a $4.2 million programme in Pakistan based on this approach.

38. There has also been an increased effort to cooperate with bilaterals as partners in regional cooperation. This is illustrated by the joint efforts under the Pacific subregional programme on judicial training, where joint programme funding has been undertaken with AusAID, DFID, New Zealand and AsDB. These efforts have been initiated at the programme formulation stage, and have resulted in a strong partnership for implementation, as evidenced by an increased level of cost-sharing.

6. Participation

39. In certain cases, low levels of participation occur when the interest and specific development priorities of countries in a particular project were either not fully ascertained during the formulation stage or not well reflected in project design.

40. Apart from expanding projects to involve civil society and private sector partners, as evidenced in APDIP, SAPAP and TRADP, attention should be given to building strong consensus around a limited number of key components in project documents and in work planning. Clarity in defining potential gains may provide the basis for sustained commitments by participating countries.

IV. Management and execution

41. Recommendations from the previous cycle, applied with a view to strengthening overall management of the RCF have resulted in (a) most of the management arrangements of the regional programme being decentralized with duties of daily management being assigned to the Principal Project Representative (PPR) and oversight being the responsibility of headquarters, and (b) a greater diffusion of PPR offices throughout the region, expanded from seven at the outset to an additional five new offices with PPR functions.

A. Resource mobilization and financial analysis

42. The regional programme has been facing dwindling resources from cycle to cycle. Compared to that of the 4th cycle, the present RCF has faced a decline of 50 per cent in allocations. During 1997-1999, while core resources for the RCF declined, the delivery of programmes funded from the core remained high. This situation was aggravated in 1999 by a reduction of core resources assigned for the financial year 2000 that resulted in a reduction in funding of up to 20 per cent for larger regional programmes in the financial year 2000, subsequent to the approval of multi-year funding commitments to programmes. Starting in financial year 2000, approval ceilings for core resources were adjusted to the new corporate targets. Most seriously affected will be projects that were in operation prior to the reduction.

43. Projects carried over from the fifth programming cycle were factors in the ratio of resources assigned between the RCF programme areas but not in the ratio of delivery in those areas. The Environment and Natural Resources programme shows a higher delivery rate than the anticipated approval.

44. As shown in the financial summary (see annex), the delivery rate of non-core resources lags behind that of core funding. The commitment/approval level of non-core resources now stands at $27 million (much above the $6 million originally foreseen), with the bulk of funds mobilized from third-party cost-sharing and GEF funds. The priority areas of enabling economic frameworks and public policy attracted third-party cost-sharing, whereas GEF funds contributed to programmes in the environment and natural resources area.

45. The Pacific subregion has been particularly successful in securing co-financing. Approximately 40 per cent of non-core resources of the region, $11 million, have been mobilized during the period of the review by the Pacific. An integral part of the subregion's success in this area, is its vigorous advocacy and resource mobilization approach in apprising donors at an early stage of the merits of the subregional programmes, and eliciting their full involvement and commitment to joint programming exercises. This strategy has borne fruit and is worthy of emulation.

B. Role and effectiveness of principal project representatives and country offices

46. The RBAP introduced new management and oversight guidelines for PPRs in 1997, which further rationalized the role of the PPR in the region. The diffusion of PPR responsibilities from 7 to 15 country offices, an innovation of the RCF, has tended to ensure that each project receives the necessary range of substantive, technical and operational field support while also broadening direct involvement in the regional programme by country offices. For example, the PPR's substantive input to regional programming resulted in the establishment of the APDIP-Cisco Networking Academy, and at negotiating intergovernmental arrangements through the TRADP secretariat. This experience has not been even across the region, however. Further, in the case of those countries that are participants in projects but where the country office does not have PPR responsibilities, greater efforts are needed to ensure that regional projects receive the attention required, given the heavy workloads and staffing constraints in the country offices. This would then lead to a gap in both communication and in the sharing of information among project participants. More broadly, it limits the benefits of decentralization to the field.

C. Project execution

47. The majority of projects in this RCF are executed by UNOPS, accounting for approximately 70 per cent while the incidence of United Nations organizations acting as executing agencies has declined significantly, to about 12 per cent. The national execution modality, as an alternative model, has been used selectively in about 15 per cent of the RCF. The modality has also been utilized in those subregional programmes where implementation is carried out through intergovernmental institutions and mechanisms (i.e., ASEAN and MRC). Finally, in the North-East Asia subregion, the Gender Empowerment through Science and Technology (GEST) project, managed by UNDP/Republic of Korea, has been cited as an example of a viable nationally executed project.

48. Cooperation with the United Nations system as well as with civil society organizations, are being promoted. UNOPS is executing agency for APGEN, whereas ESCAP and two regional NGOs are implementing agencies. ESCAP, through its Statistical Division, is implementing the paid and unpaid work component. International Women's Rights Action Watch/Asia-Pacific and the Centre for Asia-Pacific Women in Politics are implementing the CEDAW and Women in Politics components, respectively.

49. Executing arrangements are in need of improvement in the monitoring of workplans, transparency of decision-making by the executing agencies, and disclosure and accessibility of financial and other administrative information. There is a need for a corporate system that enables all parties involved in execution, management and oversight to have immediate and constant access to all information, including full knowledge of budgetary, administrative and programme issues.

50. The desk study undertaken during the mid-term review has noted a marked improvement in the quality of project documents compared to previous cycles, particularly with regard to clarity of presentation and the logic of linkages from objectives and activities to results. The diverse interests and priorities of participating countries, have led in some instances to the development of an excessive number of activities and other components in project design.

D. Monitoring and evaluation

51. Results-based management (RBM), to be achieved through the strategic results framework (SRF), along with the results-oriented annual report (ROAR), was introduced after the RCF and its major programmes and projects had been designed and implementation begun. RBM is now being incorporated into new phases of regional programming. Capitalizing on the introduction of RBM in UNDP and the design of an SRF to capture and measure results better, there is a strong commitment in this RCF to integrate monitoring and evaluation fully into all major programmes.

52. Although more work needs to be done to develop realistic indicators to measure the progress towards intended results, there is an ongoing effort to develop a more systematic approach to monitor progress. This approach includes a clear division of labour between the Bureau and the PPRs in monitoring specific activities.

53. There is also a deliberate attempt in this RCF to undertake independent evaluations of all major programmes, and a systematic effort has been undertaken to incorporate the findings and recommendations of past evaluations, both in the development of the RCF and at the planning stage of individual projects, especially of successor phases. A total of 35 evaluations were conducted during the review period, with a view to studying the long-term effects of UNDP support and providing lessons for new programmes. However, funding constraints may limit the ability to translate some of the lessons learned into new practices.

54. There is a need for more directed and more regular interaction among chief technical advisers (CTAs), PPRs and programme managers at headquarters. There is also a need to enforce the full implementation of arrangements that have been formally agreed on by the PPRs, CTAs and the Regional Bureau. It is recommended that enforcement of such accountability mechanisms be an integral and mandatory component of the performance reviews of all relevant parties.

E. Capacity-building and the use of regional expertise

55. The regional programme in Asia and the Pacific pioneered the establishment of subregional resource facilities (SURFs) in 1996, which are now supported as a core corporate activity. The SURF are dedicated to knowledge-sharing, technical expertise and referral support in given thematic areas to country offices, partner countries, CSOs and NGOs. There are now four SURFs in the region, based in Bangkok, Beijing, Islamabad and Suva, specializing respectively in poverty, economies in transition, governance, and sustainable livelihoods.

56. There has been a growing commitment to the use of regional experts with an increasing proportion of technical expertise used in regional programmes under this RCF coming from Asia and the Pacific. During the review period, there has been a three-fold funding increase towards national professionals as compared to the fifth cycle. Twelve of the 23 CTAs recruited during the period come from the region. One of the benefits of the SURF system has been to provide increased quality control to ensure that the best available resource personnel is identified and fielded in regional as well as country programmes. The Pacific SURF had a leading role in assessing the governance component of the mid-term review of the Pacific subregional programme, held in December 1999-January 2000. The quality of SURF efforts has also been validated through the use of pre-screening mechanisms and the systematic assessment of consultants' performance. However, more needs to be done to ensure the consistent quality and relevance of technical expertise through stronger linkage between the SURF and thematic focal points to appraise the appropriateness of expertise in their areas.

57. Subregional projects have also been vehicles for South-South forms of cooperation. This is particularly noticeable in North-East and South-East Asia, where the less technologically developed members of the intercountry groupings receive valued support and advice from neighbouring countries with greater experience in the application of current technologies and management systems. Examples of this process at work include TRADP, the North-East Asia Atmospheric Pollution Project, North-East Asia HIV and Development, and Environmental Toxicology.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

58. The RCF has been implemented within the framework approved by the Executive Board. The three areas of focus remain valid. However, there are insufficient resources to sustain the levels of programming envisaged and greater focus is needed within each of the three themes. The review recommends that the Regional Bureau (a) consolidate projects; (b) avoid the commitment of limited resources to new initiatives and instead add funds to critical ongoing programmes; and (c) review of involvement in some areas. The RCF implementation strategy called for greater focus to be achieved in programmes not only through careful and sustained preparatory work, but also by means of reducing the number of intercountry projects. During 1997-1999, 106 projects, most of which commenced in the previous cycle, were brought to operational and/or financial completion. During the national consultations undertaken for this review, it was acknowledged that the programme was demand-driven, added value and addressed priorities of governments. At the same time, in view of resource

constraints, there is a need to further hone the focus of programmes to a limited number of key components.

59. Within the fast changing development challenges of Asia and the Pacific, subregional programmes currently show a high level of ownership and commitment, as evidenced by projects such as SAPAP, APDIP, TRADP, which closely reflect the official development objectives of the respective subregional groupings and provide a foundation to follow up on subregional initiatives. At the same time, many issues remain of concern to nearly all countries of the region and are most appropriately addressed through region-wide programmes.

60. Mid-term adjustments are needed to address the issue of information-sharing, both for resource mobilization efforts and to capture more effectively the benefits of regional cooperation. The RCF also requires adjustment in terms of being able to respond more rapidly, flexibly and effectively to emerging crises and development needs.

B. Lessons learned

61. Partnerships are invaluable in rooting regional programmes in the realities of the participating countries. Although the process is slow, the medium-to-long term value with regard to stimulating ownership and commitment merits the additional time required. Formulation of future programmes and of current work plans should take this into account and allow the time for building partnerships, creating commitment and ultimately achieving sustainable results.

62. Programmes that take their mandate from political commitments made by regional/subregional/intergovernmental organizations provide a high level of involvement and participation.

63. The Asia and the Pacific region has an ample supply of intellectual and operational capacities to conduct most activities of regional programmes, which UNDP can exploit, given its comparative advantage and reflecting its political and ideological neutrality. What is required is the opportunity, support and stimulation to be able to collaborate and to develop further those capacities in new areas. Moreover, the regional programme provides the capacity to convene countries around issues of critical interest and the engine for further bilateral and multilateral cooperation. UNDP intercountry roles, e.g., as impartial convenor, innovator, dialogue partner, mediator of opinions, initiator of partnerships, and provider of "safe" space — both among and with various national, regional and global partners — provide the greatest return in terms of a value-added regional role.

64. To affect policy change at the country level, regional programmes should develop policy options based on solid results from pilot-testing within the participating countries and by integrating best practices available elsewhere. The regional programme provides the opportunity for countries to cooperate on pilot-testing new ideas and innovative methodologies, resulting in tested policy options that are, at least initially, not possible at the country level owing to the sensitivity of the issue area or the experimental nature of responses.

C. Recommendations

65. With due consideration to the availability of resources, high priority should continue to be given to programming within subregions, or clusters of countries from different subregions for the remainder of the RCF period, which ends in December 2001.

66. There needs to be a wider distribution of executing modalities in order to enhance in-region ownership and capacity, cost-efficiency and solid technical backstopping, including greater use of national execution and regional institutions, based on the enforcement of competitive, transparent selection criteria. It is recommended that a careful analysis be undertaken during the programme formulation stage to ensure compatibility between the programme and the executing agency, based on the technical and managerial capacity of the agency and its past execution performance.

67. UNDP should strengthen regional programmes as vehicles to increased knowledge and understanding, continue to develop tools/approaches that can readily be applied in programmes and policy change at the country level and include strong advocacy components in each programme in collaboration with regional organizations. In this context, much greater use should be made of the potential of the Internet.

68. Every programme should create and maintain web sites (a) to provide information to the public;

(b) to facilitate operational activities by partners; (c) to supply needed information for oversight and monitoring; and (d) to provide links to corporate web sites.

69. The links between the executing agency, the PPR, and the Regional Bureau should be more clearly defined (requiring the involvement of central services) to achieve improved, clearer oversight, coordination, and adherence to UNDP policy and operational guidelines. The regional programme should also formalize systems of management, accountability, monitoring and oversight of regional programme-specific guidelines, which may supplement the UNDP Programming Manual. In this context, the enforcement of regional programme accountability mechanisms should be an integral component of performance reviews of all CTAs, PPRs, and managers in the Regional Bureau.

70. For programmes still under formulation, UNDP should consider the feasibility of using alternative execution modalities such as national execution, country office execution and NGO execution and formally consider such arrangements during the formulation of each individual programme. Irrespective of execution modalities, UNDP should prepare an analysis of the feasibility of housing regional projects within NGOs, universities, or institutes, as appropriate and acceptable to participating countries, in order to increase the impact of capacity-building in the host organization. Such arrangements should be formally considered in the formulation of each programme. The piloting of new implementation arrangements may also be considered, with appropriate mechanisms to monitor closely their impact and cost-effectiveness.

71. Resource mobilization strategies must be developed and implemented to make up for core-resource constraints, keeping in mind that regular contacts and information-sharing with donors will be likely to result in increased contributions.

Annex

Financial summary

Region: Asia and the Pacific
RCF period: 1997-2001
Period under review: 1997-1999

	Regular resources		
	Amount originally assigned[a]	*Amount actually assigned*[a]	*Actual expenditure*
Programme areas	(Thousands of US dollars)		
Human development and equity	24 753	18 675	14 636
Environment and natural resources management	13 180	9 945	14 757
Enabling economic environment and public policy	28 948	21 840	26 239
Others[b]	7 409	5 590	-
Subtotal	**74 290**	**56 050**	**55 632**

	Other resources		
	Amount originally assigned[a]	*Amount actually mobilized*[a]	*Actual expenditure*
Programme areas	(Thousands of US dollars)		
Human development and equity	1 201	3 967	1 554
Environment and natural resources management	4 051	16 604	5 516
Enabling economic environment and public policy	1 168	6 537	4 842
Subtotal	**6 420**	**27 108**	**11 912**
Total	**80 710**	**83 158**	**67 544**

[a] Prorated for the period under review.

[b] Both the RCF and the RCF implementation strategy financial resources tables provide a category of resources called "Others", which are equivalent to new initiatives and continuation of fifth cycle programmes. In this financial summary, the expenditures resulting from such programmes have been incorporated under the three programme areas.